

House Agriculture Committee

June 25, 2026

Reviewing Partnerships to Enhance Management of the National Forest System

Highlights:

This hearing focused on how partnerships support the management of the National Forest System and the challenges facing forest health, wildfire prevention, and rural communities. Members and witnesses broadly agreed that U.S. national forests are under-managed and increasingly vulnerable to catastrophic wildfires, disease, and overcrowding. Tribes were recognized as important partners in forest management efforts, but Tribal issues were not a primary focus of the hearing.

Key Points:

- The discussion emphasized the importance of active forest management practices—such as thinning, timber harvest, and hazardous fuels reduction—and the critical role partnerships play in carrying out this work at scale.
 - Key partners include states, counties, Tribes, private industry, conservation organizations, and local communities, all of whom contribute expertise, workforce capacity, and resources.
- Witnesses highlighted specific programs such as the Good Neighbor Authority, Shared Stewardship, and Secure Rural Schools (SRS) as important tools that support coordination and funding.
- Several barriers were identified, including declining Forest Service staffing, regulatory and permitting complexities, inconsistent funding (especially SRS), and infrastructure loss in the forest products sector.
- There was also debate about federal policy direction, with some members emphasizing regulatory reform and increased timber production, while others stressed the need for sustained federal investment, environmental review, and collaborative processes.
- Tribal involvement was acknowledged primarily within the broader context of partnerships rather than as a central focus of the hearing.
 - Members noted that Tribes are key partners in forest management alongside states, counties, and other stakeholders, contributing knowledge, workforce capacity, and collaboration through programs like shared stewardship and forest collaboratives.
 - Some testimony and remarks emphasized that effective forest management requires coordination among multiple stakeholders—including Tribal

governments—particularly in areas like wildfire risk reduction, ecosystem restoration, and community resilience.

- Discussion of collaborative planning processes (such as NEPA and forest collaboratives) highlighted the importance of public engagement and consultation, which includes Tribal participation as part of broader stakeholder input.
- However, there were no extensive, standalone discussions specifically focused on Tribal policy, sovereignty, or Tribal-specific programs.